DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 629 JC 810 535

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TITLE How Will Educational Institutions Respond to Changing Values and Lifelong Learning?
PUB DATE 2 May 81
NOTE 15p.; Adapted from a presentation given at the Conference on Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education (Tampa, FL, May 2, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Culture Lag; *Educational Responsibility; *Futures (of Society); *Humanistic Education; Humanities; *Lifelong Learning; Public Education; Technological Advancement; Two Year Colleges; Values

ABSTRACT

In our rapidly changing society, public schools and community colleges have a responsibility to help individuals meet the challenges of change through lifelong learning. One effect of massive social changes has been the loss of control over language as a means of communication. The reduced effectiveness of academic language is particularly evident in the community college, where teachers and their nontraditional students no longer share a common language, culture, or values. From the perspectives of humanist, linguist, and social observer, one finds evidence that the problem of reduced communication is a major one. The same technology-triggered changes that resulted in this loss of control over language make the need for lifelong learning critical, as lifelong learning recognizes the importance of a continuous process of adaption to change. In the face of massive demographic shifts, increased urbanization, the obsolescence of the single career, and the altered structure of the family, well-planned lifelong education could well emerge as the main component of education's answer to the challenges of the future. The education of children, adolescents, and adults should focus on helping them effectively solve problems, cooperate intelligently, and adapt to change while preserving their rights and characteristics. (KL)

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HOW WILL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS RESPOND TO CHANGING VALUES AND LIFELONG LEARNING?

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I shall first review from several perspectives the reduced effectiveness of academically acceptable language as a means of communication in a changing society with an unstable value system; then assess the need for lifelong learning that technology-triggered change has generated in America; and finally share with you what I think our schools and community colleges can do, through lifelong learning, to help the individual meet the challenge of change.

My first perspective hinges on my membership on the Commission on the Humanities--a group of thirty-two persons from the academy, the foundations, the learned societies, and various education-related media. Established in 1978 by the Rockefeller Foundation, The Commission took a comprehensive look at the humanities in America.

The Commission's report, The Humanities in American Life, came out in August 1980 with a list of priorities and recommendations. It stresses the need to revitalize the humanities in higher education, the schools, and our communities; urges us to relate the humanities to science, technology and the media; and expresses considerable interest in the diffusion of the humanities among the non-traditional students and the adult population.

One of the Commission's major concerns is the rapid decline of the liberal arts in general and the humanities in particular. This decline illustrates the instability of the society's value system and constitutes a major threat to academe. It also poses a major challenge for education.

I think the phenomenon of decline in both areas remains tied to the broader issue of change, with the decline of the arts and sciences directly related to the decline of the humanities.

A number of institutions continue to report lower enrollments in arts and sciences courses. At one college I know well, student-credit-hour (SCH) figures for fall and winter enrollments have dropped from 245,688 in 1975-76 to 209,724 in 1976-77, 197,271 in 1977-78, 160,306 in 1978-79, and 145,000 in 1979-80. A slight increase to 148,000 in 80-81 came mainly from outreach and continuing education courses credited to arts and sciences. Throughout those years, the humanities sustained the heaviest losses.

On the other hand, the decline of the humanities has resulted, in my opinion, directly from a loss of control over language as a communication tool in the fast changing society. We talk to each other without listening or understanding. We often simply talk at each other. In recent decades, the humanists, more than other scholars, seem to have lost touch with the rest of the world. Their aim often defies comprehension. When clearly understood, it appears dangerous and useless, as the humanists constantly reopen settled issues and tend more toward contemplation than action. Through their difficulty in communicating with non-humanists, they have become their own worst enemy. Even in the classroom, what they have to say no longer seems to make sense to today's average student because, in many institutions, the "average" student is a non-traditional one. In short, we can no longer posit students and teachers to be bound by a common language, a common culture and common values.

From my second perspective--that of the linguist, nowhere is the evidence of this incongruence between teachers and students stronger than in our community colleges. The emergence and proliferation of these institutions has

not only opened educational opportunities to many new learners but also created a greater diversity among that new clientele, making the sharing of the traditional humanities with them much more difficult. For instance, a major goal of traditional humanistic teaching is the stimulation of meaningful discourse. But in fact, becoming interested in meaningful discourse about the humanities seems more and more restricted to "academic" humanists. Those with tenured positions in higher education, in particular, have been able to afford to talk endlessly without reaching any practical conclusion and still enjoy it. But the many students who are not headed toward a university career in the humanities are unwilling, perhaps unable, to enjoy open-ended discourse or even to tolerate it, although they may have to endure it in order to earn a college diploma. A nightmarish situation ensues when the students are academically underprepared.

The dilemma facing the humanist--how to communicate with the grossly underprepared students--is aggravated by the problematic status of his own willingness or ability to understand these students' problem; to view it as a teacher problem; and to accept it as a challenge that can trigger a creative response. The community college humanist has yet to learn to capitalize on the diversity of his underprepared clientele and to rely, for effective communication, not on academic language alone but on language in its broader meaning of "medium of communication" among all human beings.

The question of control over the language is not a minor one. Looking at it from the yet different perspective of the social observer, let me share with you something I saw on my way to the airport while coming here.

I had spied a traffic jam on the Interstate and decided to reach the airport through a section of Miami known as Liberty City. There was that old man sitting on a porch. I will not describe him in detail. Let's say I had seen him many times before, there and in many towns and cities all over this

country. He was watching the busy street: cars, pedestrians, animals, an occasional jet of steam from a laundry/dry cleaning place across the street, and countless little dramas that were taking shape as people entered or left the corner drug store, the liquor store next door, and the small restaurant beyond. He probably sat there day after day, month after month, for hours at a time, scarcely showing any emotion but obviously absorbing every detail of the scene with his quick moving eyes. I easily imagined him seeing not only what was happening but what was yet to happen. And he seemed to be enjoying it all.

It occurred to me, once more, that this man--as many others like him--might be delighting in the scene before his eyes with the same intensity, the same deep personal involvement, and the same quality of aesthetic experience as a university professor watching his favorite Shakespearian play in a theatre. Preposterous?

When I proposed this to a group of university administrators and professors at the Johnson Foundation Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin last April, a professor from UCLA accosted me the next day:

"I am having a problem with your old man on the porch," he said. "What has he written about his experience? If only he would share with me what he feels; perhaps I would accept his experience on the porch as the equivalent of mine in the theatre. But he hasn't written about it!"

"Oh!" I answered, "I don't think he can write much more than his name."

To complete the picture I added: "So far as I know, he can't read at all."

Then, before my colleague could recover:

"Why must he have written?" I quickly continued. "Why don't you try to talk to him in a language he can understand and perhaps you, the educated one, will discover that he indeed has something to say. Then, should you choose to

write about yourself and the old man on the porch, his experience will thus become yours and others to share--in your own way and in your own language."

"You may be right," my colleague admitted, moving on to his next session.

I see the possible dialogue between these two types--the professor in his theatre and the old man on his porch--as an extreme illustration of how we might regain control over language as a means of communication in the broader sense mentioned earlier. I also see it as a good example of the kind of lifelong learning that is indispensable both on the part of unschooled people watchers and learned college people. Without effective communication between them, however, lifelong learning across socio-economic strata in a fast changing society may well be impossible.

Many changes have occurred in recent times to lead to the loss of control over language as a communication tool. The society has moved from a predominantly rural to an overwhelmingly urban base, setting off syndromes that have become both unpredictable and uncontrollable. Most people now work for someone else in an economic system that is shifting more and more away from self-sufficiency and toward interdependence. In the process, many new occupations and jobs have been created, but most of them have emerged in areas or fields that depend on transportation and imported energy sources for survival or ease of operation. The political/economic structure of the country accommodates unhealthy symbiotic relations between the rich and the poor. The society seems to be divided into two major groups of people: one more and more driven to desperate attempts to maintain the life-style to which it has become accustomed, the other awkwardly trying to achieve that same life-style. Flaunted on television, in shopping centers, and on highways, this life-style denotes affluence and is characterized by wasteful habits. In such a society, money remains the primary consideration.

Training for gainful employment has displaced education for personal fulfillment and for the survival of society and the human spirit. Studies related to business and technology have eclipsed the liberal arts. Many traditional values have been pushed aside. In the ensuing confusion, general education, or even basic education, no longer means the same thing to everybody.

Over-urbanization has had a lethal impact on humanistic education and communication. A number of fields of study within the liberal arts, in particular the humanities, have not kept up with the realities of that changing world. I see no clear linkage between what's happening in the humanities in the colleges and what's happening in the society. Academic humanists have generally remained unimpressed by the society's mass-consumption and technology-oriented mentality. Some of them painfully realize that both the content and methods of humanities teaching had in fact been designed for another breed of students--one that has nearly vanished from many so-called institutions of higher learning. But they don't--perhaps can't--pay serious attention to the new breeds that have emerged. The many opportunities available, through lifelong learning, to act in behalf of the humanities have simply been ignored.

What is lifelong learning?

Former Vice President Mondale, while still a senator, introduced the Lifelong Learning Bill which defined lifelong learning as "programs intended to affect the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of persons who have left the traditionally sequenced educational system".

Mr. Mondale, in an article in CHANGE (October 1976), elaborated:

"I see the concept of lifelong learning as inclusive of many separate programs and concepts that have developed in recent years. These include adult basic education, occupational training, independent study, parent

education, education for personal development, remedial education, continuing education, and education for groups with special needs. Schools, factories,shops, homes, churches, and just about anywhere people gather or live can and should be the sites of such activities."

Obviously, the concept of lifelong learning accommodates educational services from the cradle to the grave--or nearly so--to an increasingly varied clientele. This broader scope for lifelong learning recognizes the need for a continuous process of adaptation in a fast changing society. The process must be continuous because the needs, the expectations, and even the values of the society, or of major segments thereof, also keep changing--mostly, in our times, because of the direct impact of technology and related forces.

Of course, the urban society itself has been shaped by technology among other forces. In a sense, even the man on the porch is a byproduct of technology and change. Both he and his urban setting raise a threat and present a challenge for educators.

True, the growth of technology in the last two decades has been impressive--almost oppressive. We are fast approaching an era where technology itself will be mass-producing new technologies. In some fields this is already happening, and humankind doesn't seem to know how to cope with it. As a matter of fact, technology is advancing faster than most people can comprehend or keep pace with. New needs are being created every day. This often means that new ways must be found to do the new things, or to do the many old things that are worth preserving--a very difficult task at best.

Technology has also created massive demographic shifts, new industries, new policy, new fields of study. Some of the latter are changing so fast that only the best minds in these fields can keep up-to-date. As a result of rapid and cumulative change, specialties are further split into sub-specialties, and so on, and so on, and so on.

Technology has made the single career norm a thing of the past. In the past, employees built seniority in a single career--often in a single job--and slowly moved toward an honorable retirement and the inevitable farewell party. Today, a growing number of Americans are dissatisfied with their careers and seek new involvements. The Monthly Labor Review of January 1977 reported that 32.2% of those working in 1965 has changed occupations by 1970. This means that every 15 years the equivalent of the entire working population changes occupations.

Technology and urbanization have affected society in many other areas. 50% of American husbands, we are told, are emotionally divorced. In an increasing number of households, both parents now work, forcing special arrangements for the care of their young. The family structure is changing and large-scale experimenting is taking place, in the society, with alternative life-styles and relationships. The male/female power relationship has been upset by Virginia Slims. People of all backgrounds and ages, of both sexes, look more and more toward emotional independence. The old power relations between people of various ages and conditions have been disrupted. Authority at the highest level sees itself challenged or simply bypassed. Human judgment is trusted less and less to decide matters of importance. The computer has not only come of age and created new technologies, it now dictates policy.

This is all happening at the same time that Americans more and more apprehend a shrinking world, the waning influence of raw military power, and the painful reality of their dependence on other countries for economic survival. Never before has there been such an urgent need for a clear and dynamic statement of America's national character and purpose, with the schools and colleges playing a major role in the formulation of such a statement.

But this is also happening at a time when, to many, the standard education in the traditional classroom has grown boring or irrelevant; for, partly because of the fast pace imposed by technology, we now live in a world that believes less and less in the future; a society tempted to eliminate from the list of priorities anything that does not promise predictable, tangible, and reasonably short-term results.

Technology, however, also presents a worthy challenge. It has improved living standards for most, making it possible for one to meet his basic needs almost effortlessly. Thanks to technology, people today are better informed, more mobile, and have easier access to formal education than ever before, creating countless challenges for humanists and non-humanists alike. People today have more options in terms of where, when, how, and what they will study in response to the challenge posed by technology and urbanization. For most, retraining may mean additional schooling.

Even people who don't have to keep up with a fast changing field come back to school--not just because of boredom or frustration, but often because of a desire to improve their worth to themselves and to the society. As Maslow points out, beyond basic needs one harbors a need for self-esteem or self actualization; one wants to do meaningful work, not just hold a well remunerated job.

For several decades now, students seeking new training, a basic college education, or just self fulfillment have been flocking to the community colleges. Many of them are underprepared. An older average age (in the 26 30 years range) characterizes them, wiping out the traditional age advantage of teachers over students. Obviously, then, these underprepared and/or older students need teachers who know more than how to teach the standard 18-year old. Yet as students drop out of school and prematurely seek work, then reenroll to pursue new goals, educators often fail to understand that the new

needs and expectations require more than a mere resumption of business as usual. In fact, new needs and expectations tend to create insecurity among traditionalists.

The community college, having made higher education available locally, must also cope with the varied needs of its many clienteles, inadequate funding, and some internal opposition to its very mission. In the midst of a sea of expectations, the community college stands as a beacon of hope and, if it fails to deliver, a convenient scapegoat. Its intended role on the continuum of lifelong learning needs to be clarified. Its potentially useful role in the area of research and experimentation in teaching strategy and in curriculum content needs to be emphasized.

This double challenge, to some extent, faces educators in the schools as well. These lower-level institutions, too, must do their share to meet the broader challenge of change in our society. With national survival a continuing priority, their contributions must combine with those of the community colleges in addressing the needs not only of the individual at a given stage of development but also his/her needs as a lifelong learner in the context of the statement of the national character and the national purpose. For America usually turns to its educational institutions for answers to its major problems. In that light, well planned lifelong education for all could appropriately emerge both as the main component of the education industry's answer to America's call and as the logical medium for implementing the statement thusly put forth.

What can the educational institutions do to meet such a challenge?

Through lifelong learning, the schools and the community colleges need to do more than teach traditional school subjects. They must develop programs that prepare people to deal with change--many forms of change, including social change, life-cycle change and, at some point in time, career change.

CHILDREN need to learn, among other things, to deal with the increasing incidence of parental separation; with the trauma of being repeatedly uprooted; with the problem of making new friends. At an early age, they must be taught to remain "their own person," even though it might be easier to follow the crowd in order to be "accepted." They must be taught to make plans, to seek and cultivate continuity in the pursuit of important goals. They must learn to make routine use of available technology--and to do so without becoming robots. They must learn to adapt to change while preserving their basic human characteristics: a capacity for joy, for appreciation of the different, for tolerance of others' exercise of their rights. and, above all, a capacity for love.

ADOLESCENTS need to master all the social and personal skills that will enable them to actualize their ambitions through cooperation, rather than competition, with their peers. They need to develop adequate methods for the independent pursuit of knowledge and wisdom; to share their intellectual and emotional assets with others who are less well endowed, and to take pride in doing so. They need to develop a strong sense of identity--not to the exclusion of others, but for the eventual enrichment of others. They need to overcome the fear of growing up; to have a clear understanding of their share of responsibility for the common good; to be aware of their rights/privileges; and to be willing "to pay their dues" toward the preservation of the system that makes these rights and privileges possible. In short, adolescents must learn to "pull their own weight" as members of a very complex society.

ADULTS need to further develop the skills needed to function responsibly in a fast changing society; to establish a suitable base for occupational, financial, emotional, social, and personal security; to learn to cope with adversity, including death, sickness, and physically impaired children; to identify options for fulfilling obligations; to deal with parenting and

mid-life problems, and with getting started after fifty. They need to learn the techniques of neighborhood cooperation in such areas as consumer economics, family management, interpersonal communication, and eradication of racism and bigotry. They also need to learn to relax, to play, and to enjoy life--not just spend it. They need opportunities to appreciate the fine arts and the performing arts. They need to learn how to take care of their body and their mind. Above all, they need to evidence a strong sense of what constitutes ethical behavior, so as to provide adequate role models for the young.

The educational institutions must develop programs that provide the basic ingredients for achieving the above, in appropriate amounts, throughout the useful life of the individual, i.e. as long as the individual is able to contribute to the common good of his/her social unit, be that unit made of two people or many people. The educational institutions must find ways in which to relate school learning to what is happening outside the academic walls. The whole environment, including porches with old persons at their observation posts, must become an adjunct learning place in the personal-growth program of every individual. The educational institutions must provide the framework and content materials for that growth.

In this context, competency requirements would acquire meaning for all. The nagging question, "what use education?" would have been answered as follows: to prepare the lifelong learner to function (a) as a problem solver in a cooperative mode; and (b) as a fellow human being and citizen in a society that will probably continue to be plagued by economic, political, and social problems and beset with challenges.

Through such a comprehensive contribution to the education of their constituencies, the educational institutions would enable all lifelong learners to cooperate intelligently, each according to his/her resources and abilities, in a common search for survival options that do not negate the democratic ideals of this nation.

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ADAPTED FROM AN INVITED PRESENTATION GIVEN AT THE CONFERENCE ON LIFELONG LEARNING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION, HILLSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE, TAMPA, FLORIDA May 2, 1981.

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